

NO. CCLXXXVII.

FRENCH'S MINOR DRAMA.

The Acting Edition.

ONE TOUCH OF NATURE

A PETITE DRAMA, IN ONE ACT.

BY BENJAMIN WEBSTER, ESQ.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED

A description of the Costume—Cast of the Characters—Entrances and Exits—
Relative Positions of the Performers on the Stage, and
the whole of the Stage Business.

AS NOW PERFORMED AT THE PRINCIPAL ENGLISH
AND AMERICAN THEATRES.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS.—[ONE TOUCH OF NATURE.]

<i>Mr. William Penn Holder.</i> Old black body coat, plaid vest, black trousers, gray gaiters, black shoes, gray bald wig, gray hat with crape.....	} Mr. Benjamin Webster
<i>Mr. Beaumont Fletcher</i> [a Barrister and Dramatic Author.] Black frock coat, fancy waistcoat.....	} Mr. Billington.
<i>Mr. Belgrave.</i> Light blue long great coat, plaid trousers.....	} Mr. W. H. Eburne.
<i>Jones</i> [Porter, &c., to the Adelphi Chambers.] Livery coat [dark], white vest, black trousers.....	} Mr. Moreland.
<i>Miss Constance Belmour.</i> Modern fancy dress.....	} Miss Henrietta Simms.

RELATIVE POSITIONS, EXITS, &c.

R., means Right; L., Left; R. H., Right Hand, L. H., Left Hand; C., Centre; S. E., (or 2d E.,) Second Entrance; U. E., Upper Entrance; M. D., Middle Door; F., the Flat; D. F., Door in Flat; R. C., Right of Centre; L. C. Left of Centre.

R. R. C. C. L. C. L.

. The reader is supposed to be upon the Stage, facing the audience.

ONE TOUCH OF NATURE.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—MR. BEAUMONT FLETCHER'S *chambers in the Adelphi, handsomely furnished, doors R., L. and C. JONES discovered.*

Jon [*Writing.*] To address the lady's-maid of a marchioness is no trifling affair, especially in the present march of intellect, when the maids know more than the mistresses. One's obliged not only to mind one's stops, but one's grammar. I have been nearly three-quarters of an hour now trying to round a period—I, who French-polish the boots of a dramatic author. Ought I to put "I was smitten," or "I was struck with your charms?"—it's very embarrassing—I must consult Mr. Fletcher. In my letter I must inclose the order he promised to procure for me; but if, with the order, I cannot conclude my letter—

Enter FLETCHER, c. door.

Fle The devil take the theatre, and all the actresses into the bargain!

Jon Has the rehearsal been unsatisfactory, sir?

Fle This Miss Constance Belmour! this Miss Constance Belmour!

Jon Sir!

Fle Is it talent or is it temper?

Jon Sir!

Fle She was execrable.

Jon Did you think, sir—

Fle Hey! what? What do you say?

Jon I was going to ask, sir, if you thought of the order?

Fle What order?

Jon The order, sir, that I asked you for this morning, for the lady's-maid of a marchioness, whom I met at Cremorne. I suppose you forgot it, sir?

Fle Oh! I had other matters to attend to.

Jon Of course, sir; of course. Then I'll go myself, sir—in your name, sir. I'm sure to get it, sir, as you write in the newspapers. Only, sir, if you should want me, sir, you will please to recollect that I am obliged to go out.

Fle Not one word of her part—not one, and the piece is to come out on Wednesday. It's enough to drive one mad.

Jon I have always said, sir, that you have never been done justice to, sir; yet you will persist in writing for these second-rate theatres. If I was you, sir, I would not write again till government built a legitimate theatre for scenery.

Fle That's your opinion, is it?

Jon Yes, sir, and it's the opinion of Miss Penelope, too.

Fle And who's Miss Penelope?

Jon The lady's-maid I mentioned just now, sir. When I told her your profession, sir, she immediately asked if you authorized the legitimate drama.

Fle And you replied—

Jon I blushed, sir, and answered that you did not, but that you intended to do so.

Fle You did right, Jones. In future I will write only blank verse, and you shall blush no more.

Jon If you will permit, sir, I will give you a subject.

Fle Well, let us see what it is.

Jon Would it not be something new and original to work up a servant whose sentiments are above his situation?

Fle Some one rang.

Jon I'll attend to it, sir.

Fle Go, then. [*Aside*] What a life! what a life!

Jon [*Returning*] Oh, sir!

Fle Still here?

Jon "I'm struck with your charms"—is it refined English?

Fle [*Bell rings*] Attend to the bell.

Jon [*Returning*] Is it more refined—"I'm smitten with your charms?"

[*Bell rings violently.*]

Fle Devil take it, they'll pull the bell down.

Jon I'm going, sir! [*Aside*] shall I put smitten or struck? I must toss up for it, heads or tails.

[*Exit door, c.*]

Fle If I allow this woman to play the part, she'll ruin the piece.

Enter BELGRAVE, c.

Bel Good morning Do you take me for a man that can be easily imposed on? No; can't humbug me!

Fle What do you mean? [*Coldly*] I'm delighted to see you.

Bel This explains the promptitude with which I was admitted.

Fle [*Satirically*] Bye-the-bye, you have come most opportunely. I have to thank you for persuading me to confide an important character to Miss Constance Belmour—that was a grand idea of yours.

Bel Capital, was it not?

Fle [*Satirically*] I was charmed with her at rehearsal just now. Luckily I can undo what is done. I mean to take the part away from her.

Bel A brilliant idea that, I must confess; and any one but me would let you follow your bent.

Fle What do you say?

Bel It is useless to disguise matters. I know all. Can't humbug me.

Fle What do you know?

Bel All! [*Showing bouquet.*] Here is your bouquet, returned like a dishonest bill—no effects.

Fle My bouquet?

Bel Do you deny that you sent these flowers to Constance?

Fle I'm in a nice humor to send her flowers. I am going to write to her.

Bel To anyone else you please, but not to her. This rage is all moonshine. Can't humbug me.

Fle Moonshine, is it?

Bel You are in love with Constance; and you would have us believe you intend taking this part from her, and lose by the change.

Fle I will soon prove that.

Bel I am not a man to be easily imposed on. Can't humbug me!

Fle This is folly. It was not I who sent the bouquet.

Bel Not you?

Fle On my honor!

Bel Then I will find out, if I go to every flower-shop in London.

Fle Do, my good fellow, do.

Bel I will, depend on it. I will not rest until I have discovered the truth. I will know who sent this bouquet. Adieu. I am not a man to be easily imposed on. Can't humbug me! *Exit, c.*

Fle Now there goes a man determined to make himself miserable. To win Constance from him would be no very difficult task. The day before yesterday I spoke to her; she was not at all coy, and when I took her hand in mine—it is true that this act of sensibility has borne its fruits. Till then her rehearsing was very so so; but since she imagined I was fascinated by her coquetry, she has not rehearsed at all. Love is evidently no friend of mine. Once a man gets his legs entangled in the steel traps of a crinoline, it's all over with him. So I'll pluck up resolution, and inform this popular lady that I will relieve her from the part. [*Writes.*] "My dear young lady." Hum! It is rather difficult to write disagreeably to a woman whose hand you have pressed in yours but two days since. "My dear —" [*A rap at door, c.*] Come in. [*Rap repeated.*] Come in.

Enter HOLDER with manuscript, c.

Hol [*At door*] It's me, sir.

Fle Oh! good day, Mr. Holder.

Hol Do I disturb you?

Fle No. Come in.

Hol Here is your manuscript. I have copied it all but the last scene, which you did not give me.

Fle Here it is. I had some corrections to make.

Hol Shall I take it home with me and finish it?

Fle No, no. Copy it here; it will not take ten minutes.

[*He looks over the manuscript.*]

Hol Is it readable?

Fle It is beautifully clear.

Hol You flatter me. I know it is only good feeling induces you to give me your manuscripts to copy.

Fle No, Mr. Holder, no.

Hol But for you I should have starved.

Fle Starved! Die of hunger in wealthy London!

Hol It is true, though; that day when you found me almost fainting near the stage-door of the theatre.

Fle Ah! what the devil were you doing there?

Hol I was waiting.

Fle Waiting? For what?

Hol [*Quickly*] Nothing. I expected nothing. I—I came there by accident, because I had not strength to go any further. Ah! sir, I wish I was enabled to prove to you that I am not ungrateful.

Fle Do not mention it.

Hol But I will mention it. Why yesterday I received through you a guinea for copying a comedy—a guinea, sir, a whole guinea. I have not been so rich for many a day.

Fle [*Laughing*] Which you doubtless invested in stocks.

Hol No, sir, roses.

Fle Roses! and you spoke of starving.

Hol It was for another, and I may never have the means again. Self-denial was, in this instance, a pleasure to me.

Fle Well, well, privately as politically, I suppose you have a right to do what you like with your own.

Hol Ah! if you only knew—no matter. Your piece is very pretty.

Fle You like it?

Hol Yes; perhaps I am presuming in giving an opinion.

Fle Not at all. I rather like it.

Hol It's very pretty. There is one part in particular that affected me to tears.

Fle Which was that?

Hol The scene where the father finds his daughter.

Fle [*Aside*] The very part that Miss Constance Belmour absolutely murders.

Hol It's fine, very fine! The father speaks as a father should; I, if I found myself in a similar situation, I feel I should express myself exactly as you have written.

Fle The eulogium pleases me infinitely

Hol I have read that scene over at least ten times. I know it by heart.

Fle Indeed!

Hol Let me see—"My child! my child! come to my arms. It is you alone can efface the sufferings of twenty years!"

Fle That's it; that's just what I mean.

Hol That scene requires to be well acted.

Fle Does it not?

Hol Well acted by the man, and well acted by the lady, in particular.

Fle [*Aside.*] He's quite right.

Hol The lady has but one word to say, but one exclamation: "My

father!" but the success entirely depends upon the manner of her giving it.

Fle You are right, and I shall hesitate no longer. [*Writes.*] "My dear Miss Belmour,—It is quite impossible"——

Hol Miss Belmour! Did you say Miss Constance Belmour?

Fle Yes, I cast her this part—I am writing to relieve her of it.

Hol Take the part from her? from Constance—christened during the run of the *Love Chase*.

Fle Your "Father!" has decided me.

Hol My "Father!" decided you? In opposition to Knowles's most beautiful creation? You shall write no such thing.

Fle What!

Hol Take this part from her, give it to another, and humiliate her. You must not write. Why would you take it from her?

Fle Because she'll murder it.

Hol Murder it! poor child! The part contains sentiments she is a stranger to. She does not appear to feel sufficiently strong the expression, "My father!" Who knows? perhaps she has never known a father, or a father's love.

Fle You seem quite affected?

Hol You will not write? If you take this part from her I shall hate you—to know that you caused her pain through what I have said. It would drive me mad—it would kill me!

Fle What did you say?

Hol Pay no attention to what I say—my head is a little shaky. Promise me, only promise me, you will not take this part from her. She will play it admirably—beautifully.

Fle Oh! —— well, there.

[*Tears up letter.*]

Hol Bless you! Bless—don't mind me—I'm an old fool. Explain it to her. If I could speak to her, I —— explain to her what you wish. She'll play it to perfection. She has intelligence—you have not observed it. Ah! you don't know her—she's a genius.

Fle You speak of Miss Belmour?

[*Knock and bell.*]

Hol Hush! some one's called. It is she!

Fle How do you know?

Hol It is she, I tell you. I am not mistaken—it is she!

Fle Well, this is the most singular——

Enter CONSTANCE, door c.

Hol [*To FLETCHER.*] I was right, you see.

Con Good morning, my dear Mr. Fletcher. What nice chambers you have here—only a little high.

Fle [*Coldly.*] You here, Miss Belmour!

Con Oh, dear! what a refrigerating reception.

Fle I was writing to you—

Con To tell me—

Fle That I should not require you in my piece.

Hol [*Aside to FLETCHER.*] Oh, sir!

Con Very amiable of you, very amiable, indeed. [*Seeing pieces of the*

letter, and picking up one.] "Belmour—it is quite impossible"—why did you tear up the letter?

Fle Because I was entreated to allow you to retain the character.

Con By whom?

Fle Mr. Holder.

Con Mr.——I remember your face somewhere, sir.

Hol [*Subdued and quite overpowered.*] At the theatre, probably.

Con If I am not mistaken, I have often seen you as I entered the theatre.

Hol Possibly! Possibly!

Con What ails you? are you ill?

Hol No, oh dear no; It's only a——I was not prepared——it is the first time you have spoken to me.

Con And that produces such an effect on you?

Hol Yes. I don't know how it is—but it is nothing.

Con Poor man!

[*She is about to take out her purse, but on a look from HOLDER she arrests her hand.*]

Hol [*To FLETCHER aside.*] You see? She would not insult me by offering me money.

Fle Will you finish copying the last leaf.

Hol Ah! yes, directly—conclude its done.

Fle There is some mystery about you——

Con [*R., Taking of her bonnet and shawl.*] Will you be kind enough to assist me, Mr. Fletcher? What an ungallant man you are.

Fle I beg your pardon.

Con As I came here, I met Fitzcharles in her brougham with her father.

Fle Was the father on the box?

Con No, inside.

Fle You astound me.

Con Perhaps it's his birthday.

Hol Oh! Lord!

Fle [*To HOLDER.*] Can't you make it out?

Hol I'd come to the tag, sir; the tag!

Fle [*Aside.*] I can't make him out.

Hol Your conversation distracts me.

Fle Then copy it in my study.

[*Pointing to door R.*]

Hol No, I shall be more at home in the hall.

[*Going.*]

Con [*To HOLDER.*] Adieu, my good friend. I shall make it a point of speaking to you whenever I see you now. I wish you to get accustomed to my voice.

Hol [*Aside*] Ah! Ah! she has not insulted me by offering me money.

[*Exit C.*]

Con What and who is this Mr. Holder?

Fle A copyist; he is often here. You have produced a singular effect upon him.

Con Then I am to understand that but for the intercession of this good creature I should have received by post, stamped at its full value, the gracious compliment.

Fle On second thoughts I might not have sent my letter.

Con The fact is that you are like Macbeth, "Letting, I dare not, wait upon I would." My dear sir, between ourselves, you want it here, [*touching her forehead,*] you do indeed!

Fle Confess, now, that you rehearsed to-day on purpose to turn the whole piece into ridicule.

Con Well, and if I did—the piece deserves it? A father—a daughter—the old story, old as the world.

Fle What matters, if the situations are new.

Con It's a dramatised police affair.

Fle What signifies if the manager is bound over to keep the peace.

Con Well said! Capital! Now don't put itself out of temper. I freely admit that the story is very touching, but if I do not feel it, what would you have? It is a sentiment I have never experienced, and, therefore cannot comprehend.

Fle [*Aside*] Holder's right.

Con At any rate I shall *look* the character to the life, and that's *everything* now-a-days. I shall have a simple white robe. Oh! I have been very studious about my dress.

Fle And you don't know a word of your part yet.

Con Ah!—that's because I have not studied that.

Fle That reason's conclusive.

Con Besides, I was out of temper. Some one sent me a bouquet this morning, and Belgrave has been making such a fuss about it.

Fle He came to me, pretending that I had sent you the bouquet.

Con And it was not you.

Fle Certainly not.

Con Decidedly, that Belgrave is insupportable.

Fle He quitted me, swearing that he would find out who sent it, if he searched every flower-shop in London.

Con And he is not a man to be imposed upon—at least, that's his monomania. I was very curious to know who sent this bouquet, and he charged himself with satisfying my curiosity. I fear he will have only his trouble for his pains.

Fle Why are you so anxious to know?

Con Because in the present day the man who sends a bouquet anonymously, and does not inform you what it cost, is a rare specimen of the *genus homo* worth knowing.

Fle You have a rare wit, beyond a doubt, and you would be perfect if you would study the part in my piece.

Con Ungrateful monster! Now can you guess why I have come here?

Fle No.

Con To go over the part with you seriously.

Fle Is it possible?

Con At the theatre, instead of rehearsing we were saying disagreeable things to each other; as that did not appear to me to advantage the piece, I thought an hour with you in good earnest would not be thrown away.

Fle You're an angel.

Con That's an incontrovertible fact, for what everybody says must be true; but since you intend this character for another—

Fle I!

Con Have you not told me so to my face? and [Sings.

"My face is my fortune, sir, she said."

Fle A moment of irritation—I was not serious.

Con Did you intend to give the part to Fitzcharles? They say you are smitten in that quarter. She'll listen to you. She delights in literary men—but they are *not* the wise men who *know* themselves to be fools.

Fle I did not intend to give the part to Fitzcharles. I am not smitten with her, and you know that well.

Con Well, now, we must attend particularly to the scene when the father and daughter recognize each other. I candidly confess that at present I have no idea of it. When I exclaim "My father!" I always feel inclined to laugh.

Fle Then that would damn the piece.

Con Hush! Let us hope that I shall find it no laughing matter on the day of representation.

Fle Most fervently, I hope so.

Con Ah! you must send some one for my part; I have left it at home.

Fle You go to the rehearsal without your part, and you don't know a word of it.

Con But I have the credit of knowing it, for I spoke to my cue.

Fle Not without a prompter. I'll send for it. Jones! Jones! Where is he? Jones! Jones!

Enter HOLDER, C.

Hol Jones is gone out, sir.

Fle There now!

Hol He's gone to the theatre for the order you promised him.

Fle Devil take him! and the order too.

Con You have yourself to blame—you should not break your promises. You should not "palter with him in a *double* sense," when the order was doubtless for two.

Hol As I have finished copying, if I can be of any service—

Con Yes; it's a great service you can render me with very little trouble.

Hol A service—to you!

Con It is to go to my house, and ask my servant to give you my part.

Hol I fly.

Con Where are you going to fly to?

Hol To your house.

Con Without knowing the address.

Hol Oh, I know it—Norfolk street, No. 90—close by.

Con You know my address?

Hol Yes, at the theatre—heard it accidentally—the prompter told the call-boy, the call-boy told the messenger—and I fly. [*Exit, c.*]

Con What a strange man! I recollect seeing him often about the theatre. How very singular.

Fle When you spoke to him just now, I thought he would have fallen.

Con I perceived it.

Fle Perhaps he has fallen—in love with you.

Con Absurd!

Fle Has it never crossed your mind, when the curtain fell, to think that among those who had seen and applauded you, many perhaps loved you who never would be enabled to declare their love—

Con “But let concealment, like a worm in the bud,” &c. Yes, such a vain idea has flitted through my brain.

Fle Without the slightest impression?

Con Yes, a momentary pleasure.

Fle You are a very woman to your fingers' ends.

Con Beware of them. But come to business. It will be awkward rehearsing without Melfort, who plays the father.

Fle I'll send for him

Con Melfort stands upon his dignity. He's a fettered lion. Send for him. You had better go for him yourself.

Fle Where shall I find him?

Con At the theatre until four.

Fle [*Looking at his watch*] And it's five minutes past.

Con You have no time to lose.

Fle It will not take five minutes to go to the theatre, and they allow ten for the variation of clocks.

Con Do it, “nor leave the task to me.”

He is running off, c., when he knocks against BELGRAVE, who seizes him by the collar.

Bel A word, if you please.

Fle Presently, my friend; I'm in a hurry.

Bel Do you still persist in saying that you did not send the bouquet? No humbug.

Fle I do, I do, I do! there, now let me go.

Bel But you did send it; I am certain of it. I have proofs.

Fle I shall be curious to know them, presently.

Bel I will show you at once, if you'll listen.

Fle Impossible!

Bel Do you think to escape me thus? I am not a man—

Fle Unhand me, I say. [*Disengages himself, and exits, c.*]

Bel Well, that's one way of cutting short an explanation. For whom do they take me? [*To CONSTANCE*] You here, madame?

Con Have you not perceived me?

Bel You here! What are you doing with Mr. Fletcher?

Con Rehearsing my new part.

Bel Rehearsing! what, the part he but now vowed you should not act? At any rate, you ought at least, both of you, to recollect that

I am not a man to be *easily* imposed upon. Can't humbug me! something remains behind.

Con Then leave it in the hall. You have already made yourself perfectly ridiculous this morning, and very little more will render you perfectly insupportable.

Bel That's very easily said, madame, very easily said; but when my mind—

Con Your mind!

Bel Yes, madame, my mind. I beg leave to respectfully assert that I have a mind, and when the suspicions of that mind are appeased, then, madame, and not till then—

Con What an excellent tragedian you would have made.

Bel Tragedian? humbug! I have my hand full of proofs—this bouquet—

Con Pansies for thought—Love lies a-bleeding. Have you been waiking London with this bouquet?

Bel Yes, madame, I have, and have ended by finding out what I sought to know.

Con And what is the great discovery you have made? One would almost imagine it was perpetual motion.

Bel Mr. Fletcher sent you this bunch of flowers.

Con The race is not to the swift. You have discovered nothing. Fletcher did not send me those flowers.

Bel I beg your pardon; this bouquet was purchased in Regent street this morning at 10.45 A. M. The man who bought it was old, and dressed in a drab hat and black coat. They gave me an exact description of him, and I recognized him immediately—the copyist who is always at Fletcher's elbow, and who is literally his right hand.

Con The copyist purchased it?

Bel Of course. I'm not a man to be imposed on! Can't humbug me!

Con And that proves that Mr. Fletcher sent me these flowers

Bel Unless we are to believe that this poor devil amuses himself in purchasing bouquets worth a sovereign each out of twopence a length.

Con You have a lively imagination, and make marvelous jumps at conclusions. Has it never entered the cavity of your head that in London there may be two men who wear a drab hat and black coat?

Bel Possibly! possibly!

Enter HOLDER, c.

But talk of the old gentleman, and so forth; we can know from himself.

Hol Here is your part, madame.

Bel [To HOLDER] Do you know this bouquet?

Hol The one I purchased this morning.

Bel [To CONSTANCE] Proof positive!

Con Well, if Mr. Fletcher did send the flowers, what then?

Hol It was not Mr. Fletcher who commissioned me to purchase this bouquet.

Bel Who then ?

Hol Eh ! who ?

Bel Yes—no humbug !

Hol [*Confused and hesitating*] Oh ! it was—hum !

Con [*Aside*] Can Fletcher have divined ?

Bel [*To HOLDER*] Well—go on—Ah ! Fletcher is not a man to put his light under a bushel. Fletcher is a man of imagination—a dramatic author—an original genius ; not a translator of unconsidered trifles.

Con What a fuss about a few roses.

Bel *Rose d'amour*, madame. A Fletcher by any other name—I mean, any other rose is as sweet. Never mind. I don't understand the language of flowers—no, all humbug. But this I know : there are men who resign themselves to the part you require them to act, madame. There are others who refuse to play second to any one, and who, when once they perceive their position ridiculous, cease to remonstrate, and respectfully offer to cancel the engagement.

Con Delightful ! Why did you not say so before ? What a world of words it would have saved. "Stand not on the order of going, but go at once."

Bel Very good, madame, very good. An angel's face, but a—

Con Oh, mercy !

Bel You have no heart. [*Throws bouquet on floor.*] Adieu !

Exit, c.

Con This bouquet—you purchased it, and sent it to me ?

Hol Yes.

Con These are flowers of great price.

Hol Yesterday, at the theatre, I was standing behind one of the wings, and I heard you say you loved them.

Con Oh ! [*Aside*] Decidedly I have made a conquest here.

Hol Don't be angry, I entreat of you ; nor don't laugh at me.

Con I am neither angry with you, nor in the mood to laugh at you. But what would you have me say to you ?

Hol Ah ! Cons—madame !

Con You are doubtless very unhappy. I feel for you ; your sufferings touch me nearly.

Hol [*Making a step towards her ; he stops*] My chi—

Con You must leave London, and when you see me no more you will forget me.

Hol You are right. I will go far, far away—but first—

Con In truth it is the only advice I can give you—see me no more—go.

Hol I will go—but—

Con It must be ! Adieu !

Hol Adieu !

Con Stay ! the bouquet you have purchased for me, give it me—at least I may keep that.

Hol [*Picking up the bouquet, and giving it to her*] Ah ! thanks—thanks !

Con Poor man !

[*Exits door, R.*

Hol To part without embracing her. I would have given the

world for one embrace, and have called her my —; but no, it's impossible! I will go at once—if I look on her again, my courage will fail me; and yet, I cannot leave her thus—one embrace, one kiss, and I depart for ever. Ah! Constance, Constance! my dear Constance! [*Falls on his knees, and covers the shawl of CONSTANCE with kisses.*]

Enter FLETCHER, C.

Fle Come, that's all right—Melfort's promised to come. [*Sees HOLDER.*] Hollo!

Hol Constance! my own Constance!

Fle What are you doing there?

Hol Some one here! [*Rises.*] Oh! it's you, sir! I should not like to have been surprised by any but you.

Fle What's the matter with you, Mr. Holder?

Hol You think me a little cracked, I dare say. You shall know all. I can confide in you. You are good.

Fle Speak out, man, for really I cannot comprehend.

Hol When I have told you, you will understand that I cannot go without one embrace. You will assist me to find a way. After that, I swear, by all that's good, I will leave the place for ever.

Fle Well! proceed.

Hol My story is not long. Twenty years ago I was a tailor in Long Acre. I was not a fashionable tailor, but still I did a good trade, and made money. I met a young girl—she was pretty—very pretty. She lived alone with her father, an old chorus-singer, who was always drunk, at least he was never sober—and consequently Martha was very unhappy. I proposed marriage to her, and she accepted. For three years I was the happiest of men. I was passionately fond of my wife. I had a daughter whom I adored. My happiness was too great to last. About this time a young man often came to me, and ordered a variety of clothes which he never wore. On one occasion I observed him speak to my wife in a manner I thought rather strange. I mentioned it to Martha, and she said I must be mad. I loved her—and was silenced. Some few days after this young man came again. I heard whisperings, then bursts of laughter. This time I asserted my position as a man and a husband. Martha replied in most unblushing terms. Next day I went out. When I returned, my house was empty, my home deserted. Martha had eloped with this young man, and taken my child with her.

Fle The wretch!

Hol Little by little my wounded pride effaced the image of Martha, but another memory clung to me: my daughter, the child I had danced on my knee, that I taught to lisp my name—this babe whose smile was sunshine to me, whose first word was like an angel's whisper to my ear, she was lost to me forever.

Fle Poor fellow! poor fellow!

Hol Fifteen years dragged its weary time away, when one day I received a letter without an address—it was from Martha. She had doubtless written it on her deathbed. Her seducer, after having

taken her to France and Italy, and dissipated time amidst their pleasures, had abandoned her. She dared not return to me. "Pardon me," said she, "I have been bitterly punished. As for your daughter—"

Fle Well, your daughter?

Hol It was the greatest blow of all, but it must be told—"As for your daughter, I know not where she is, but you will easily recognize her if you recall my form and features. Such as I was when you first saw and loved me, such is your child to-day—the same face, the same look, the same voice." I uttered a cry of joy. My child lives—I shall see her once again.

Fle Why, this is stranger than fiction.

Hol I traversed the town in the hope of meeting her—resorted to every public place. I was repulsed from every door—my inquiries were laughed at; but jeers and insults could not stay me. I peered into each coach and cab, watched at the door of every ball, waited by the entrance of all the theatres—everywhere. I stared in every woman's face that passed. One day I heard a voice, the voice of Martha: a woman appeared—the form of Martha. "Constance," said some one. The woman turned—the face of Martha. Constance—it was the name of my child!

Fle She!

Hol Yes. I saw her again next day. Not a day passes without my seeing her.

Fle And you have not thrown yourself in her arms? You have not made yourself known to her?

Hol No.

Fle Why not?

Hol How might she have received my burst of affection? A word effaces not fifteen years of indifference. The love of a father and child is not an instinct. I can endure being unknown to her, console myself by looking on her and loving her in secret; but to say to her, "I am your father," and not be loved—

Fle She would soon learn to love you.

Hol If I had been a stranger to her for fifteen years, and they said to me, "Here is your daughter," that would not suffice to make me love her. Now, thank heaven, I have nothing to reproach her with, poor child! To forgive is to merit forgiveness. Besides, I am poor, old and without resources. When I should have told her that I was her father, what would she have done? Offered me bread as a duty. There are those who would have eat of such bread. Would she have placed me beside her in her carriage, or with her groom on the box?

Fle What, then, do you desire?

Hol To depart; she has advised me to do so. Only before my departure I would enfold her in my arms—press one kiss of affection on her cheek.

Enter JONES, C.

Jon A letter, sir.

Fle Oh! you are returned at last.

Jon I only went to the theatre—I told you, sir, what for.

Fle Does it take an hour to go there?

Jon On my way back I called on Miss Penelope, sir, and informed her that in future, sir, you had promised to stick to blank verse.

Fle Give me the letter.

Jon Here it is, sir.

Fle It's from Melfort! "My dear fellow, you must excuse my coming to your house. Remember I have a character to lose, and were I to rehearse with a girl of seventeen anywhere but in the theatre, the world would *affiché* me to her." A vain ass!

[Crushes up the letter.

Jon I'm very fond of *dialect* with *les Dames*. Is the piece French, sir?

Fle Go to the devil!

Jon Perhaps, sir, I could adopt it to my style sufficiently—

Fle Will you go?

Jon I'm going, sir. [Aside] I am studying "French without a master," that I may read the English drama in the original.

[Exit, L.

Fle So there's an end of our intended private rehearsal.

Hol If I simply express to her my desire to press her to my heart, she would laugh at me. Heaven's will be done! Would I could find some way—can you not help me?

Fle Did you not say but now that you knew by heart the scene in my piece where the father discovers his daughter?

Hol Yes, sir.

Fle Capital! You shall embrace your daughter.

Hol Indeed! How—when—where?

Fle Here—now.

Hol I shall embrace her—she will permit me to do so, and yet she shall not know?

Fle She shall know nothing!

Enter CONSTANCE.

Con Well! will Melfort come?

Fle He has written to me to say he cannot.]

Con Then the rehearsal is a *fiasco*?

Fle Decidedly, unless you rehearse without him.

Con Will you rehearse the father?

Fle No. I must see you; listen to you; if need be, prompt you.

Con Who will do the father, then? [Seeing HOLDER] You here still, sir?

Fle I requested Mr. Holder to remain. He knows the scene by heart at which you boggled to-day.

Hol [Aside] Ah! I understand!

Con The scene of recognition—you know it by heart?

Hol Yes; through copying it, it fixed itself in my memory.

Con What a memory! I have been studying that scene more than an hour, and I do not feel myself master of it yet.

Fle Now, if you please, we'll go through it with Mr. Holder.

Hol [*Aside to FLETCHER*] God bless you!

Con With Mr. Holder?

Hol You object?

Con Well really, it's the oddest circumstance—

Hol [*Aside to FLETCHER*] Bless you!

Fle Listen. [*To HOLDER*] Control your feelings.

Con What's our position? Oh! you there, sir—I here—presently you cross me. By-the-bye, Fletcher, all is over between Belgrave and I. Oh! it's such a happy release.

Fle Come, begin.

Con I am ready.

Con We—we commence the scene after the young girl's story?

Fle Precisely.

Hol [*Rehearsing*] "When you arrive in London repeat that to me again; the servant who accompanied you brought you to an old lady?"

Con "Yes.

Hol "The lady at first received you unkindly, is it not so? Soon she would not part with you?"

Con Yes; but how know you that?

Hol "I know it"—

Con You are quite affected. You are perfect to a letter, and rehearse it charmingly—much better than Melfort. You ought to have been an actor.

Hol I could not act all parts like this!

Fle Go on! You do it much better, Belmour, much better! Go on!

Hol "Five years passed, when one day this old lady called you to her. 'This is your home,' said she—'the moment has arrived when I must depart.'

Con "Her very words!

Hol "And she quitted you—she exhibited no sign of affection for you—she only announced to you that a man would shortly present himself to you. 'This man—

Con "Was he to whom I offered my daily vows, though to me he was unknown. 'That man,' said she, 'is your father.'

Hol "I am he.

Con "You?

Hol "Yes—I—I!" My child! Yes, at last, my child. Yes, 'tis I—'tis I—

Con Stay—that's not it—you forget—there's nothing of that kind in the manuscript.

Fle No—

Hol What is it, then?

Fle [*Reading*] "My child—my child! Yes—I—your father! Not

a minute during the twenty long years which have separated us, have I ceased to think of the day when I should be enabled to press you to my heart."

Hol I beg your pardon; I was mistaken. "Yes, your father! Not a minute during the twenty long years which—" What comes next?

Fle "During the twenty long years which have separated us, have I ceased to think—"

Hol Not a minute during the twenty long years which—" No father, on finding his daughter, would make use of such an expression.

Fle Why, just now you said—

Hol Here is a man who has not seen his daughter for twenty years—who seeks her—who finds her—sees her—speaks to her—and you put in the mouth of this man a long rigmarole. He could not speak it. Impossible! tears—sobs—that's all. My child, here, come to my heart—let me gaze on you—do not speak. My child, how sweet that name. Come, your father, 'tis I. Not a word—you know not—you cannot know—my child! my child! ah!

[FLETCHER writing.

Con You are faint?

Hol No; it's nothing—nothing. That's more like what I should feel.

Con It's put me out completely. I don't remember a word now.

Fle [Writing] He's right. His ideas are more natural than mine. "One touch of nature—"

Con [To HOLDER] You are crying.

Hol Likely; it's the character of the father. Let us finish the scene, will you.

Con What a splendid actor you would have made!

Hol Let us finish the scene.

Con "You say you are my father.

Hol "You doubt it! Happily I can invoke remembrances that will give confidence to your heart." [To FLETCHER] Here is another passage which must be altered:—"Do you not recall your days of childhood? A cottage surrounded with large trees—the high road passing before the door—

Con "Yes—yes!

Hol On this road, in the distance, a man who, waving his handkerchief, shouted, 'I am here.'

Con I remember well.

Hol "He crossed the threshold—pressed you in his arms, and, kissing you again and again, he danced for joy. Can you still doubt?

Con "My father!"

Fle That's not it, Belmour; not at all—you never give sufficient force to that word.

Con Eh! well, then, let some one else do it.

Fle Be patient—be patient. You can do it to perfection, I am

sure, because you have it here and here [*Touching his head and heart*]. Why not work yourself up to the notion that this young girl who has not heard speak of her father for twenty years, and who suddenly finds herself face to face with him, is yourself.

Con What do you say?

Hol Imagine yourself the girl you are representing.

Con There is something in your words and manner—

Hol Try again. This time you will feel the words. "He pressed you in his arms, he kissed you again and again, he danced for joy. Can you still doubt?"

Con "My father!"

Fle That's not up to the mark yet.

Con I know it is not, but I shall never do it better.

Hol [*To FLETCHER*] I suspect the fault rests with yourself. The remembrances you invoke in this scene are very vague. A road, a man on a road; there is nothing to lead up. Who knows, now, if we were to change some words?

Con Ah! yes; cut out, "My father!"

Fle Cut out "My father!" You had better cut me out. Why that is the great point of the piece.

Hol No, no; change the details.

Fle To what? to what?

Hol Allow me. [*To CONSTANCE*] Recall to your memory, my child, bethink you well—a large room—a man seated on a table—cross-legged—who sometimes crept towards you with his head moving up and down, like a monkey, to make you laugh.

Con Ah!

Hol Do you remember? By the side of this man a large pair of scissors, called shears, with which you always wanted to play—and the man scolded you gently—very gently—told you not to touch them.

Con Surely that was—go on—

Hol And one day when you cut yourself with these shears, your blood flowed, you remember?

Con Yes—

Hol You cried—the man jumped from the table, pale with fright—but when he saw it was nothing, he pretended to laugh, and beat the scissors very hard to console you—my child, my child—that man, do you remember him?

Con My father. [*She falls in his arms. They embrace and kiss each other with strong feeling.*]

Hol She said it right then! You heard. Said it finely, eh? suiting the word to the action, the action to the word. She may keep the part now.

Fle And are you still bent on departing.

Hol Departing! What do you mean, departing?

Fle Why, just now, you talked of—

Hol Ah! just now—just now she had not said, "My father."

Con And do I indeed embrace my father, that best protector from the world's assaults. Oh! I have often dreamed of this, but the bright reality, with its vivid flashes of childhood's memories, seem to endow me with a new existence of filial love and pleasure.

Hol You hear, you hear—did I not tell you she was a genius? My good genius! One touch of nature has restored a child to a father's heart. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

THE END